



DOC officials respond to Tracy's remarks on department

Lt. Gov. candidate said on Monday that IDOC needs changes

February 21, 2014

Illinois Department of Corrections in response to Lt. Gov. candidate Jil Tracy's remarks concerning the department.

TO: The Quincy Journal

FROM: Illinois Department of Corrections

RE: Candidate Jill Tracy's remarks, reported in the Journal

The Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) is happy to discuss, at any time, various aspects of its operations and the tremendous responsibility we fulfill in ensuring public safety. We believe all discussion should include facts, not fabrication and unsubstantiated claims.

Claims of increased inmate violence, jeopardized safety of IDOC staff, or understaffing and a related security risk are not supported by data or facts because none exist. Such data and facts do not exist because those claims are pure fiction.

Tamms was not a "safety valve" for Illinois prisons, and there has been no increase in violence in this system since Tamms closed. In fact, serious assault on staff in our prisons was down and overall serious assault dropped 35 percent in the most fiscal year. That downward trend continues.

Meanwhile, the savings from various facility closings are happening at the rate of \$5.83 million every month, \$70 million on an annualized basis. A one-time loss of \$30 million in savings was due to the lawsuit filed by the employees union, AFSCME, which delayed the closures and employee transfers for seven months.

To say staff assaults are up ignores key facts and is thus misleading. IDOC enforces a zero-tolerance policy. Even minor contact with a correctional officer such as spitting, flipping away an inmate name tag or throwing food which might touch an officer's foot is classified as "assault." This inflates the total number of assaults, which looks bad, but inmates know that even slight behavior issues will hurt earned time. Calling them out for small matters keeps them in line, which is why overall serious assaults are down.

The suggestion that transferring inmates from Tamms has caused problems at other prisons is simply untrue. Menard received only seven offenders from Tamms; the majority were sent to Pontiac Correctional Center, where the warden and staff report those transferred were involved in just three serious incidents in 2013, a year in which such incidents declined at Pontiac.

Security posts at no Illinois correctional center are ever understaffed. Mandatory [security] posts are agreed to, in writing, by both the Department and the union. This agreement with AFSCME on such matters is longstanding and fully met with staffing of every security post, every shift.

Overtime costs, since employee transfers were completed, have sharply declined. IDOC projects to save \$17 million to \$20 million in overtime during this fiscal year, which would leave us at or below the FY12 total. Yes, overtime has grown during the past six years, but that is due to an increase of 3,300 in our inmate population.

There is no "accounting procedure" involved in IDOC accurately determining the operational capacity of its facilities. The one-inmate-per-cell practice is not used today anywhere in the United States, and with standard double-celling, our operational capacity is between 49,000 and 50,000. We are not overcrowded. Extra room? No. But we have enough space to house all inmates safely, with everything expected in a humane system.